

2023 Candidate Experience Report

Job seekers reveal what they want to see in a hiring process



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How Important is the Candidate Experience?

In recent years, we've seen a positive trend emerging in recruitment strategies — a focus on **candidate experience**, which can be defined as:



CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE



the experience a candidate has with a potential employer throughout the hiring process, from job posting to job offer.

Changes in the labor market have certainly kept employers on their toes over the last few years. In a job market still recovering from the pandemic, recruitment and hiring will likely not return to “business as usual” any time soon. Businesses will need to continue to adapt to job market fluctuations in order to remain competitive.

Some notable trends that have made hiring even more challenging are **increased competition for talent** and **higher expectations from job seekers**.

Many businesses feel like they are no longer competing with only others in their industry for workers – they are now also competing with giant retail and warehouse employers like Amazon, Target, and Walmart, as well as gig economy jobs like Uber. And high inflation and changing employee sentiment over the last three years have led to job seekers demanding more from their potential employers.

Plus, regardless of the state of the job market, **the best candidates will always have the ability to be picky about where they want to work**. All of these factors make the candidate experience even more important.

If you understand what candidates want out of a hiring process, you can put your business at a significant advantage in any job market.

For this report, we wanted to find answers to some of the questions that have been confounding employers, such as:

- √ How much does the **candidate experience** matter?
- √ What are **job seekers looking for** during a company's hiring process?
- √ What are the top reasons candidates **decline job offers**?
- √ How often does a hiring process **influence a candidate's decision to accept or reject** an offer?
- √ How can employers **improve their candidate experience** to hire more successfully?

Read our full report to learn the answers to these questions and more.

Who Took This Survey

We surveyed 500 U.S. participants who've applied for jobs within 11 key industries in the last 12 months and analyzed their answers about their experience during the hiring process from the job seeker's perspective.

Industries Surveyed:



Automotive



Cleaning Services



Education & Child Care



Fitness



Healthcare



Home & Commercial Services



Insurance & Financial Services



Hospitality, Entertainment & Recreation



Personal Care



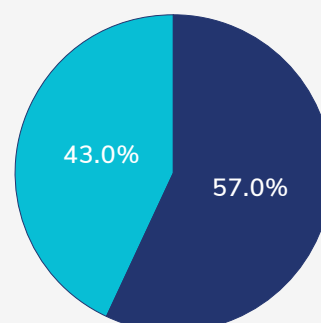
Restaurant & Food Service



Retail

Gender Identity Breakdown:

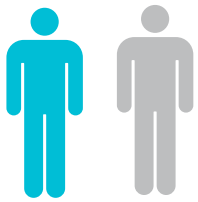
57% of survey participants identify as women, **43%** of participants identify as men.



What Job Seekers Are Saying

49% of job seekers have declined an offer because of a poor candidate experience.

We found that:



48% of job seekers have had at least one negative experience in the hiring process in the past 12 months.

49% of job seekers said they've declined a job offer because of a poor experience with a potential employer during the hiring process.

Let's think about that for a moment. Consider all the resources your business puts toward hiring and recruiting, and how challenging it can be to find applicants for your open roles. Then consider that when an offer is finally made, **if you've created a negative candidate experience, nearly half of your offers will be declined.**



56% of men who participated in our study claimed they had a negative experience with a potential employer in the last 12 months vs. **42%** of women.



55% of men who participated in our study have considered leaving their job in the last 12 months vs. **46%** of women.

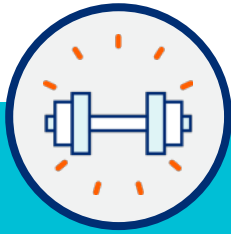


Industry Insight:



Education

In Education, **56%** have declined a job offer because of a negative experience with a potential employer.



Fitness

60% in the Fitness Industry said they've had a negative experience with a company they've applied to in the last 12 months.



Personal Care

In Personal Care, **60%** have declined a job offer because of a negative experience with a potential employer.



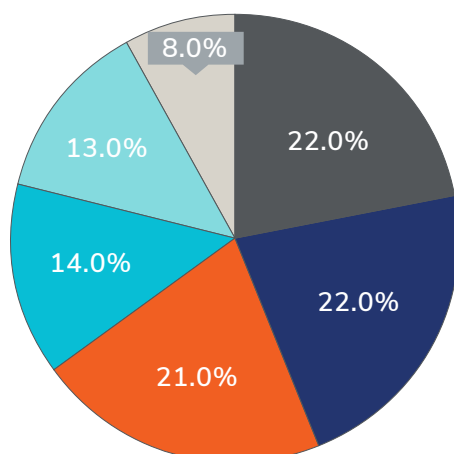
Retail

In Retail, **60%** have considered leaving their current job in the last 12 months.

“Compensation and benefits not meeting expectations” and a “negative experience with people in the interview process” are the top reasons candidates decline job offers.

So what parts of the candidate experience have the most impact on a candidate's final decision to accept an offer? Here's what we found:

Reasons job seekers declined an offer:



The compensation & benefits didn't meet my expectations



I had a negative experience with people in the interview process



The role & responsibilities were different from what I expected



I was worried about the company's COVID safety measures



I disliked the workplace environment



The interview process was slow & disorganized

What does this mean for employers?

As employers, you can make corrections to the earlier stages of your hiring process to reduce the likelihood that candidates will decline your roles in the offer stage. Here are some ways to address the top reasons candidates decline offers.

- **“The compensation and benefits didn’t meet my expectations.”** We recommend [disclosing a salary range](#) in the job posting, and [some states and cities](#) have actually made this practice mandatory by law. This sets salary expectations immediately and helps ensure that you receive applicants you can afford. It’s a hard truth for many employers to accept, but it’s a waste of everyone’s time if you’re tens of thousands of dollars off from a candidate’s expectations. There’s little to be gained from employers waiting until late in the hiring process to negotiate salary, especially when our data shows that **22% of candidates** have turned down offers as a result of this outdated practice.
- **“I had a negative experience with people in the interview process.”** Train hiring managers and hold interviewers accountable for conducting great interviews — asking appropriate questions, creating a welcoming environment, and being respectful in your interactions with all candidates.



Further Reading: Read our [Hiring Manager’s Guide to Interviews](#) for more advice on how to interview like a pro.

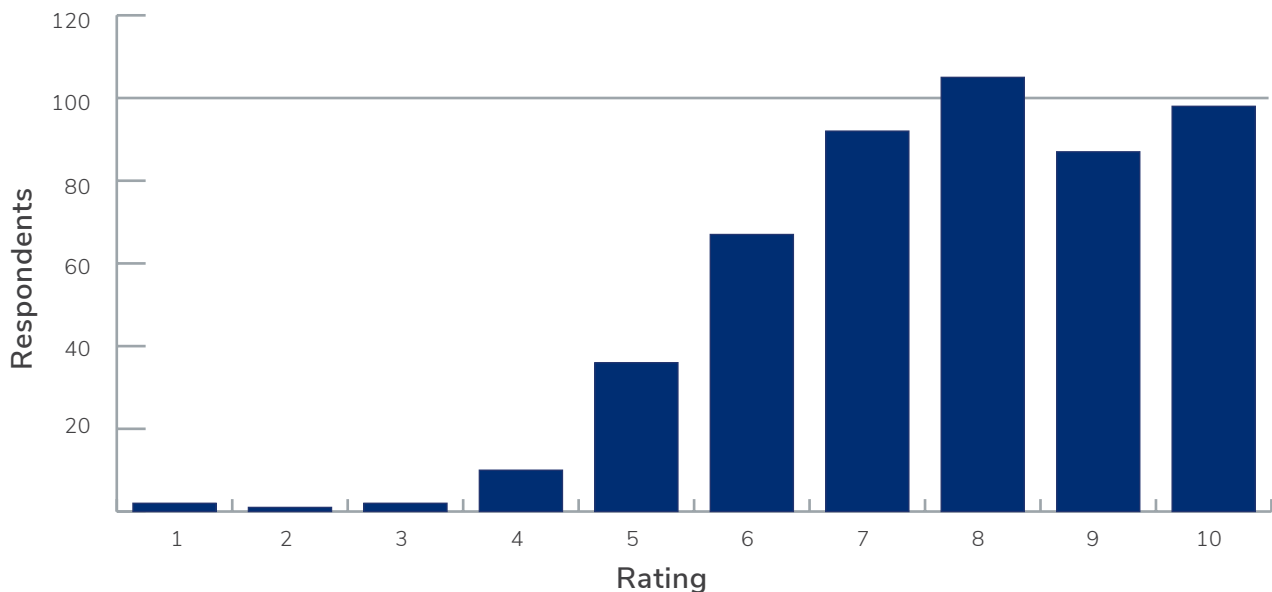
- **“The role and responsibilities were different from what I expected.”** Take the time to ensure that your [job posting](#) is thorough and accurately reflects the responsibilities of the role. Candidates look to your job posting as their guidepost when envisioning themselves working for your company. If they find out later that it’s not accurate, they’ll feel like you wasted their time. Leave time for candidates to ask their own questions about the role and your company. Lead with transparency and answer their questions honestly.



Further Reading: Read our guide, [How to Write a Job Description](#) to create a job posting that attracts the right applicants for your roles.

How Much Do Job Seekers Care About the Hiring Process?

On a scale of 1-10, how important is the hiring process experience to you?
(1 = Not Important; 10 = Very Important)



We asked job seekers to rate how important the hiring process is to them, with 1 being “not important” and 10 being “very important.” The overwhelming majority rated the hiring process between 7 and 10, indicating that **most candidates pay close attention to how a company carries out its hiring process**. Very few respondents indicated that the hiring process was of low importance to them.

Positive candidate experiences lead to more hires.

Clearly, candidates care about the hiring process and a good experience impacts their decision to accept a job offer. When asked about the company they currently work for (or most recently worked for), **87% of employees rated the candidate experience in the hiring process as positive**. And 81% of candidates said that a positive experience influenced their decision to accept an offer.



81% of candidates said a positive candidate experience influenced their decision to accept an offer.

Candidate Experience and Your Employer Brand

The impact of a poor candidate experience extends beyond the disappointment of a rejected job offer — it has serious implications for your employer brand, or your business's reputation as a place to work.

It's standard for job seekers to spend significant time researching a company's reputation on employer review sites like [Glassdoor](#), [Indeed](#), and [JobSage](#). These reviews serve as social proof, signaling to candidates what they can expect from your hiring process and work environment. This means it's crucial to maintain a positive candidate experience for all applicants — whether you hire them or not.



28% of candidates said they've left a **negative** review online after having a negative experience.



57% of candidates said they've left a **positive** review online after having a positive experience.

Providing a positive experience to all candidates will lead to more positive reviews on employer review sites. These important insights from other job seekers will encourage more people to apply to your open roles.



“You don't have to spend much time on the internet to learn that most online reviews tend to skew negative, so it's great to see such a high percentage of candidates also sharing their positive experiences. It is so helpful and empowering to future candidates. We've spoken to many jobseekers in our line of work and most simply want to learn the truth, both the good and the bad.”

Jacob Rios, Co-Founder and CEO of [JobSage](#)

Ghosting in the Hiring Process: Who's Ghosting Who?

Candidate ghosting has been a major concern for many employers this year. This typically refers to a candidate disappearing sometime during the hiring process – like ignoring your attempts to schedule a phone screen or not showing up for an interview.

This can be frustrating when trying to fill your open roles, but it's worth taking a moment to consider that this precedent was actually set by employers. In fact, **our data suggests that employers are actually ghosting more frequently than candidates.**

Communication with candidates is a two-way street, so it's up to employers to set the trend and follow up with every candidate – even the ones you don't want to hire.

45% of candidates have been ghosted by a potential employer.

36% of candidates have ghosted an employer.

34% of job seekers say they never heard anything back from an employer after sending in an application.

At what point in the hiring process were you ghosted by a potential employer?





Industry Insight:



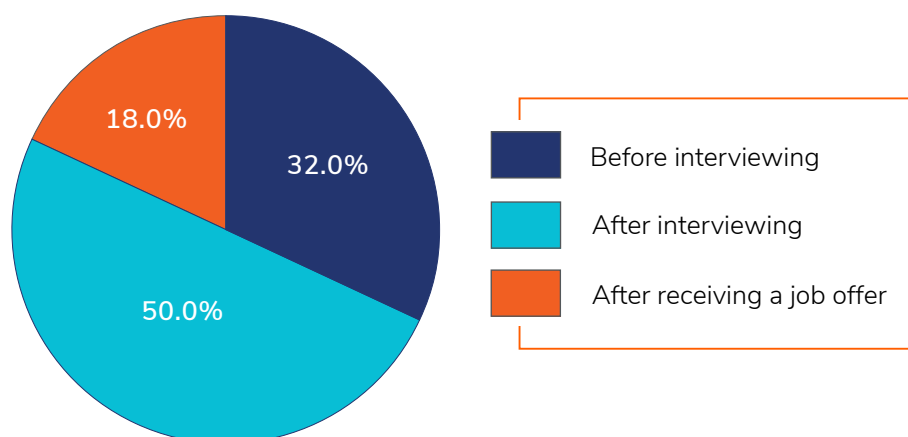
Pro tip: Hiring automations like those available in [CareerPlug's applicant tracking system](#) can automatically send out a courteous rejection email to unqualified applicants. And when a top candidate catches your interest? [CareerPlug's Autopilot](#), an **automatic interview scheduler**, makes it easy to set up an interview ASAP and sends candidates reminders to prevent ghosting.

Hospitality, Entertainment & Recreation

53% of job seekers in the **Hospitality, Entertainment, & Recreation industry** said an employer has ghosted them. **46%** of this group said they were ghosted after sending an application. Employers in this industry should make it a point to respond to all applicants to maintain a positive employer brand.

50% of candidates who ghosted did so after interviewing.

At what point in the hiring process did you ghost a potential employer?



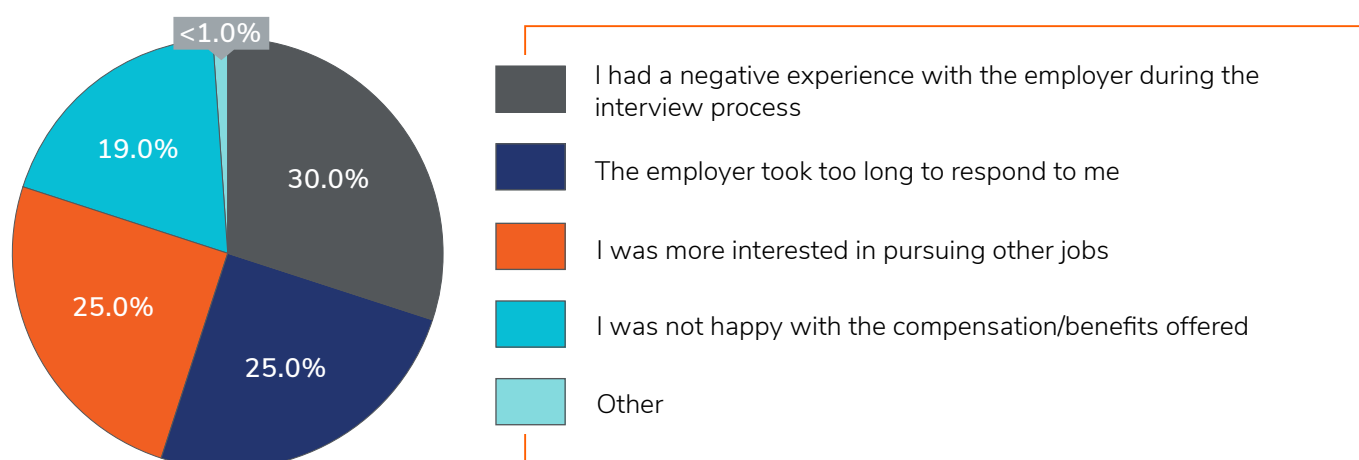
Out of the 36% of candidates that said they have ghosted a potential employer, half said that they did so after interviewing. This can be frustrating for employers that have set aside the time and resources to interview someone for an open role.

Why are candidates ghosting?



Since most candidates are ghosting post-interview, it's not surprising to learn that a **negative experience with an employer during the interview process was the #1 reason candidates have ghosted**. Employers that take too long to respond are another big reason candidates drop out of a hiring process.

As a job seeker, what was your primary reason for ghosting?



Imagine this: A candidate is interested enough in the role to speak with you about it, they show up, and are so discouraged by the experience the interviewer provided, that they drop out completely. This is a common, yet totally preventable scenario. As an employer, the interview experience is something you can control that can help you prevent ghosting and get more candidates to say yes to your job offers.

Like most employers, you probably have plenty of other things on your plate than just hiring. However, taking too long to respond to candidates might make you miss them, so this is yet another thing you can try to improve. Using an applicant tracking system can help you stay organized and more easily (and quickly) communicate with candidates in the various stages of your hiring process.



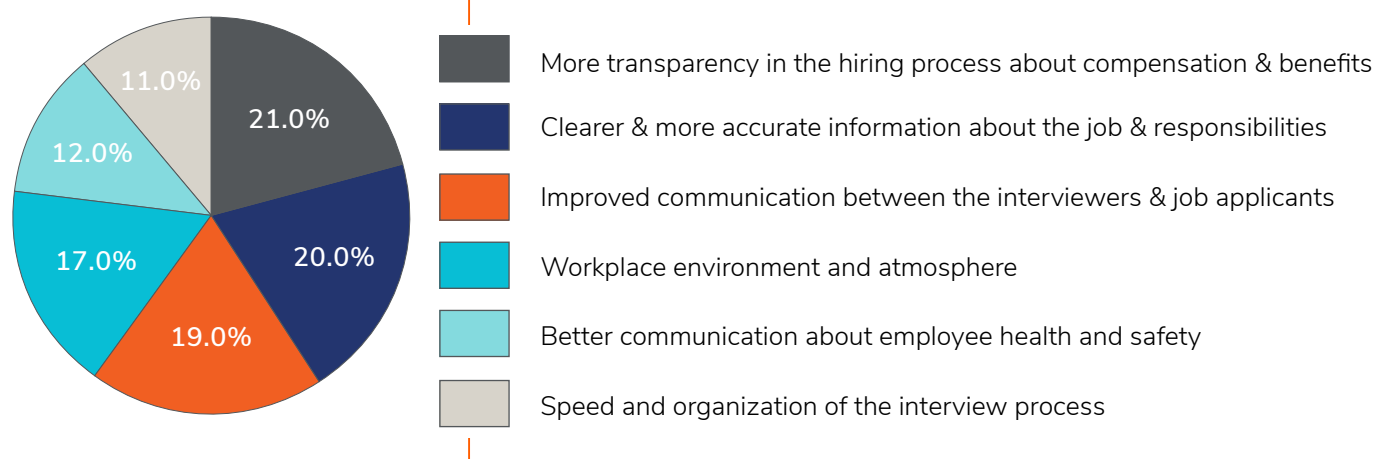
Further Reading: Have you been haunted by candidate ghosting? Check out our blog and webinar: [Why Interview Ghosting is So Common and How to Prevent It](#) for even more tips and insight.

How to Improve the Candidate Experience

We asked job seekers to weigh in on specific advice employers can use to improve their hiring processes.

What should employers focus on most to improve the hiring process?

Improvements employers should focus on most:



Just like in last year's report, the top two recommendations from job seekers were:

1. **Create more transparency in the hiring process about compensation and benefits**
2. **Provide clearer and more accurate information about the job and responsibilities**

Both of these issues should be easy for employers to address. You have all the information about the role you're offering, so be sure to communicate it to applicants.

Candidates said “atmosphere of the workplace” was the most important factor that might influence their decision to join a company.

Candidates say they’re evaluating the atmosphere of the workplace during the hiring process and it plays a big role in their final decision. Here are some of the other important factors that candidates care about.

Most important factors that influence a candidate’s decision to join a company:

| FACTOR | PERCENTAGE OF JOB SEEKERS |
|---|---------------------------|
| Atmosphere of the workplace (e.g. fun, welcoming, etc.) | 25% |
| Responsiveness throughout the hiring process (e.g. how quickly you’re contacted after applying/follow-up emails after interviews) | 23% |
| Hiring process transparency (e.g. being told the number of steps, types of interviews, etc.) | 23% |
| Interviewer Experience (e.g. personality, body language) | 12% |
| Remote technology experience (e.g. ease of joining a video interview, internet connection quality) | 9% |
| Appearance of the workplace (e.g.) physical office or remote/hybrid environment) | 9% |



The workplace atmosphere isn’t only important for hiring! It can help you retain your employees as well. In our [Toxic Work Environment Report](#), we found that 84% of employees that are planning to leave their jobs would stay at their current company if their employer made changes to create a more positive workplace.

Communication and transparency are also important to job seekers.

23% of job seekers ranked **hiring process transparency** as important, and the same amount ranked **responsiveness throughout the hiring process** as important.

Communicate with candidates early and often. Let them know how the hiring process will work up front, like how many stages there will be and how long they can expect the process to take. We recommend taking care of this during your first phone screen, since **41% of candidates expect to learn about next steps in the hiring process during the initial interview**.

When job seekers expect to learn about the following during the hiring process:

| | BEFORE APPLYING/ IN THE JOB POST | BEFORE THE INITIAL INTERVIEW | DURING THE INITIAL INTERVIEW | IN THE LATER INTERVIEW STAGES | AT THE OFFER STAGE |
|--|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Compensation | 27% | 24% | 34% | 9% | 5% |
| Benefits | 24% | 24% | 37% | 10% | 5% |
| Company Culture | 22% | 24% | 37% | 11% | 6% |
| Stages/Next Steps in the Hiring Process | 16% | 20% | 41% | 18% | 5% |

Improve responsiveness throughout the process with **text recruiting**, which allows you to communicate with candidates easily through a platform they are familiar with.



Text messages have a **98%** open rate, and on average **45%** response rate.



Emails have a **20%** open rate, and on average **6%** response rate.

What You Can Do Now

Invest in Your Hiring Process

Creating a [high-quality hiring process](#) will not only improve candidate experience but will also improve your ability to hire quality people for your team. Consider using an [applicant tracking system \(ATS\)](#) to help you attract the right applicants for your roles with compelling job postings and communicate quickly and easily with candidates throughout the hiring process via email or text. An ATS like CareerPlug can automate these crucial hiring process steps, allowing you to hire the right people faster.

Create a Candidate Experience Checklist

Remember to do the following before your next round of hiring:

- Write **accurate job descriptions** that include core responsibilities and requirements.
- Include **compensation and benefits information** early in the process, on job descriptions or during the initial phone screen.
- Respond to **all** applicants **quickly** whether you want to hire them or not. (Use automated text messaging to make candidate communication easier.)
- Communicate the hiring process steps and timeline upfront**, either during initial phone screens, in the job postings, or on your careers page.
- Include context in interview invites about **who candidates will be interviewing with** and the **format of the interviews** — the goal is to let candidates know what to expect.
- Provide training and **hold interviewers accountable for conducting great interviews** — from questions to ask to proper etiquette (e.g. being on time, avoiding distractions, etc).
- Get feedback from current team members:
 - Ask current employees what their experience was like during the hiring process and **why they said yes to the offer**.
 - Ask current employees what they like about working for your company and gather ideas about how you can **incorporate that culture into your hiring process**.



ABOUT CAREERPLUG

Since 2007 CareerPlug has worked to make hiring easier for over 16,000 growing companies. We designed our hiring software for non-HR people so every owner, operator, and hiring manager can make the right hires for their team. From owners to candidates, we believe in creating exceptional experiences for everyone. To us that means providing a playbook on How to Hire, making it easier to access best practices, and automating the process so you can focus on what matters: making the right hire!

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